

When war was declared in September 1939 I was working as a secretary in the office of a lace company. Within a few months most of the young men had been 'called up' and quite a few young women decided to get married to avoid national service. I was a bridesmaid twice in two weeks!

As time went on I realised I would soon have notice to leave my present job or else war work in a munitions factory or join one of the women's services. As my father was dying of cancer and my only brother was in the army I decided to join the Women's Land Army.

I was sent for 6 months to a nursery in Loughborough to which I cycled it being only about 4 miles away. We had Italian P.O.W. working with us as it was harder for them.

I'd always liked gardening but this was something else digging 2 spits down out of doors whatever the weather.

After my 6 months there I moved to help at a small holding which couldn't have been more different.

It was in our village but across the railway and river. The owner Mr. Cook and his wife lived in a wooden bungalow and had lots of animals.

Each morning I had to collect Dobbin the horse from a field near my house and take him to the smallholding. To start with I pushed my bike and led him but getting a bit fed up with that I made myself ride my bike and lead the horse.

The boss would usually be still in bed when I arrived and after opening all the shutters and chasing the goat off the roof I'd start the real day.

This man also bred Aberdeen dogs which were

then taken by the Curfew to guard aerodromes so I usually started the day exercising these dogs. One day dog was my friend - Roger - who before long would be sitting outside my gate to look after me & Dobbin!

It was extremely hard work here and when he bought a cow I learned how to milk - harvest

We also had a market stall in the nearest town of Loughborough. We had to prepare the vegetables the day before so in winter I started gathering Brussel sprouts etc. just knocking off the ice then when we got to market the sprouts etc. froze to the stall! In season also I had to go into the nearby field & steal mushrooms because there would always be a queue at the stall! What a delivery!

With having as many animals to feed on the way home from market we filled up with horse manure from the knackers yard. At the farm he had an outside copper where he alternatively boiled chamo meat on a spit. The spit was to be peeled! No gloves.

Towards Christmas I made holly wreaths.

There was a small 'hide' among the acres of brussels etc. where the boss would spend his time shooting pigeons! During the course of the seasons I made haystacks! When it was seed time I had to wear a wooden roller on my shoulders and pull along a small gadget to make seed drills guided by the boss.

When it was fruit picking time because he had no trees he'd buy an orchard from another farmer and wedged fruit gathering all day.

On market days as I was obviously the only female there I usually 'looked after' 2 other stalls while the men went to the pub!

DEAR ALICE

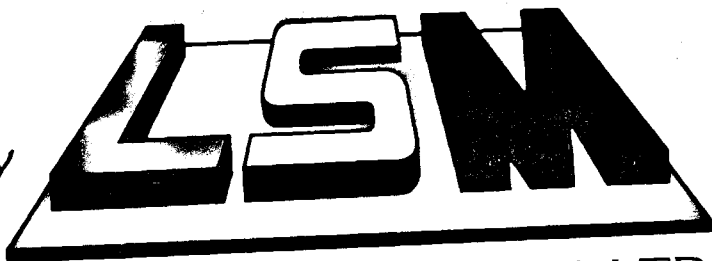
PROMISED HERE IS MY  
NOTES - PLUS NAN'S.

STORY.

LOVE NANCY GRAY XX

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N. H. CLARKE (1929-45.)

HAVING SPENT 4 YEARS AT MILITARY COLLEGE OF SCIENCE, AND QUALIFIED AS A  
FIRST CLASS INSTRUMENT ARTIFICER, I WAS ALREADY IN THE ARMY WHEN THE WAR BEGAN.

I WAS THEREFOR SENT TO FRANCE WITHIN THE FIRST WEEK -  
WE LIVED IN A SMALL MINING VILLAGE CALLED LOOS-EN-GOHELLE NEAR LENS.  
MOSTLY IN THE LOCAL TOWN HALL, SCHOOL BUILDINGS, LOCAL HOMES ETC.

IN THE FIRST 6 MONTHS NOTHING MUCH IN THE WAY OF FIGHTING TOOK  
PLACE, SO THE PERIOD BECAME KNOWN AS THE 'PHONEY WAR'.

I HAD LEARNT FRENCH AT SCHOOL AS A BOY, AND COULD READ SOME OF WHAT  
WAS IN THEIR NEWSPAPERS, BUT WHEN IT CAME TO TALKING TO THE LOCAL PEOPLE,  
WHO HAD BECOME FRIENDS, IT WAS FAR DIFFERENT.

THIS WAS A MINING AREA, AND MOST OF THE PEOPLE WERE OF POLISH  
DESCENT. AND THEIR FRENCH WAS A STRONG DIALECT PECULIAR TO THAT  
AREA. - AFTER A COUPLE OF MONTHS HOWEVER I COULD TALK QUITE FLUENTLY  
IN WHAT THEY CALLED - PATOIS - FRENCH.

THIS CONTINUED UNTIL THE GERMANS EVENTUALLY ATTACKED AND WE  
RETIRED TO DUNKIRK - WHERE HUNDREDS OF SMALL BOATS TOOK US BACK  
TO ENGLAND - THE GERMANS SANK SOME OF THEM - BUT I CAME BACK BY  
SWIMMING A QUARTER OF A MILE AND BEING PICKED UP BY A THAMES BARGE  
CALLED "THE HERB"

P.T.O.

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ONCE BACK IN ENGLAND, I WAS IN BRISTOL THEN NOTTINGHAM, AND FINALLY  
ROCHESTER IN KENT - WHILE THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN WAS ON. I HAD TO REPAIR  
AND MAINTAIN ANT-AIRCRAFT GUNS IN SOUTH LONDON, DOVER, AND KENT COAST TOWNS.  
WHEN THE BATTLE WAS OVER, I WAS SENT TO THE MIDDLE EAST, EGYPT, LIBYA,  
IT TOOK 2 MONTHS TO GET THERE ON A SHIP AROUND SOUTH AFRICA, AND  
UP TO SUEZ THROUGH THE RED SEA.

THE FIRST CAMP WE HAD WAS NEAR THE SPHINX, AND PYRAMIDS OUTSIDE  
CAIRO.

WHEN OUR ARMY ADVANCED ALONG THE COAST OF N. AFRICA AS FAR AS  
TOBRUK WE WENT INTO THE DESERT, AND IT WAS 3 YRS LATER BEFORE THE  
GERMANS WERE BEATEN AND DRIVEN OUT OF AFRICA.

I WAS A STAFF-SERGEANT BY THEN, AND I WAS SENT TO ISRAEL -  
WHICH WAS PALESTINE IN THOSE DAYS. I LIVED IN A HOUSE ON MOUNT CARMEL AT  
HAIFA. I OCCASIONALLY HAD TO GO BACK TO THE CAMP AT SUEZ CANAL AREA.  
SO I DROVE A 3TON LORRY ACROSS TO SINAI DESERT SEVERAL TIMES -

THE WAR FINALLY ENDED IN AFRICA, SO MOST SOLDIERS WERE NEEDED  
BACK IN ENGLAND FOR 'D' DAY INVASION.

I CAME HOME ON A DUTCH SHIP TO GLASGOW, AND FINALLY GOT HOME TO  
SEE MY PARENTS FOR THE FIRST TIME IN 4 YRS. IN LEICESTER.

I WAS STATIONED FROM THEN TO WOLVERHAMPTON, NEWARK, AND FINALLY  
LOUGHBOROUGH, AND IT WAS THERE, I MET AND MARRIED GRANDMA. IN 1946.  
WHEN THE WAR WAS OVER, ON V.E. NIGHT THE WHOLE POPULATION CELEBRATED  
IN THE STREETS - IN LEICESTER MY BROTHERS WHO WERE HOME FROM THE WAR - ALL  
MET AROUND THE CLOCK TOWER WHICH WAS PACKED WITH HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE